

SYMPOSIUM MELDS PAST AND FUTURE POLAR RESEARCH Johnson, G.L.

An international symposium, Perspectives of Modern Polar research, was convened in Bad Durkeim, Germany, to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the birth of Georg von Neumayer, the noted polar explorer and facilitator of the German and international polar science. Neumayer, who lived from 1826 to 1909, began his career as a seaman in the merchant marine. Through his skill in geophysics and meteorology, he rose to become the founder and director of the Flagstaff Observatory, Melbourne, Australia, hydrographer to the German Navy, and director of the Hamburg Oceanic Observatory. He was instrumental in organizing the first International Polar Year (IPY) in 1882-1883.

Symposium participants came from Denmark, Germany, Norway, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Presentations covered a wide range of topics, including Arctic biomass calculations, effects of ice scouring on benthic communities, tectonic issues, the life of the Norse settlers in southwestern Greenland and the enigma of their disappearance, plus Arctic circulation and North Atlantic decadal variability.

Arising from the participant discussions was a strong consensus that a program should be formulated to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the initial IPY in 2007. After another IPY in 1932, the IPY evolved into the International geophysical Year in 1957. Renewing the IPY concept would require applying to the International Council of Scientific Unions or some other appropriate body for sponsorship, participants noted.

The program envisioned for 2007 would investigate the role of air/sea/ice interactions in climatic variability. It would also probe the lithosphere dynamics, defined as the evolution and history of crust and sedimentary cover. This would require modern interdisciplinary/international science using new technologies such as sea floor observatories and new platforms. The proposed European research ice breaker AURORA BOREALIS- with dual moon pools, dynamic positioning and a scientific drilling capability-is a prime example of such a platform. Participants made clear that scientific must start now and emphasized coordination with existing programs such Study of Arctic Environmental Change (SEARCH), as necessary components, with joint programs platforms when possible, and development of automatic equipment. According to the Neumayer Declaration adopted at the meeting, the geographic focus of the program would be polar regions.

The symposium was sponsored by Pollichia, a scientific organization founded in 1840 to promote the study of natural sciences in the Rheinland-Pfalz region of Germany. Currently Pollichia has 3000 members and supports a multi-faceted program. Additional support was provided by the Bundesamte fur Seeschifffahrt und Hydrographie and the Alfred-Wegener Institute fur Polar und Meeresforschung. Proceedings have been published as special edition of Pollichia. See illustration below.



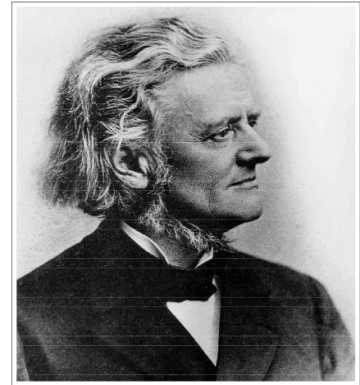
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Georg von Neumayer, chief of the
Deutsche Seewarte in Hamburg.
Photo courtesy of Pollichia